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ABSTRACT

Loosely structured interviews were designed to discover the perceptions of workers involved in a European Social Fund (ESF) training project for unemployed British women regarding the intentions and results of the training scheme. A process of inductive coding for the transcript analysis was followed. The coding scheme developed from the interviews had nine main areas: research method; the workers; the funder's intentions; trainees' needs; workers within the funding scheme; management; the issues of difference between all the women in the project; achievements; and the "dream." Findings and analysis indicated that the aims and intentions of each group fell broadly into two categories: immediate and future or long term. The workers aimed to provide the trainees with a positive supportive learning environment that included the manual skills training. The workers' long-term aim was that the trainees should gain paid employment and economic independence. The trainees' long-term aspiration for future paid employment converged with the workers' aim to train women for employment. The workers' believed only a small number of trainees were actually interested in the manual skills training itself. The workers' unanimous opinion was that women were not being trained in skills suitable to the needs of the local economy. Some were suspicious of "built-in failure." (YLB)

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RESEARCH REPORT

ESF FUNDED TRAINING FOR UNEMPLOYED WOMEN: THE CASE STUDY.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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INTRODUCTION.

The research project focused on the policies of the European Union towards vocational training for unemployed women funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), (Brine 1993). Within Britain the trainees were aged mainly between 30 and 45, poorly educated and economically impoverished. The training opportunity offered was often eagerly seized upon by unemployed women. There was through the period covered by the study (1983-1993), very little other training or educational opportunity which was so well supported and which similarly required no financial outlay from the trainees themselves.

The training scheme chosen for the project's case study was typical of one of the two main types of ESF training being offered to unemployed British women during the 1980s. It trained women in 'non-traditional manual skills. This refers to a particular range of manual skills that are non-traditional to women, but traditional to men. The use of the word 'traditional' implies that these skills have been gendered this way for a long time. 'Non-traditional manual skills' generally refers to the skills and trades related to the construction and building renovation industry, for example, plumbing, painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery and brick-laying. The second main type of training within the UK was enterprise job creation, especially worker co-operatives.

'New technology' is also referred to in this report. 'New technology' has two interlocking meanings. The first refers to specific industries and occupations. These industries include computer hardware, telecommunications, information technology, biotechnology and computer software. The specific occupations of new technology include for instance, electronic engineers, software engineers, electrical engineers, computer analysts and programmers, electronic and electrical technicians, data processing operators, and computer operators. The second meaning of 'new technology' is its reference to the impact of computerised technology on almost every other occupation and industry, and in numerous instances on domestic and leisure daily life. 'New technology' in this report refers to this double-linked broad use of the term.

OPY AVAILABLE

The report leads to questioning vocational training policy towards unemployed women with previous low educational attainment.

RESEARCH METHOD.

This case study focused on the workers involved in a British ESF training project for unemployed women. 'Workers' are those women employed by the Local Authority to work on the project - either in management, (co-ordinator or outreach worker) or as teaching staff, (instructor or tutor).

The research question was:

> What were the workers' perceptions of the intentions and results the training scheme, for themselves, the funders, and the trainees?

The method of loosely structured interviews were designed to discover each individual 'worker's' overall perception of the training scheme and her understanding of her role within it. The interview schedule, constructed simply as a 'checklist', was based on my existing knowledge and experience of the field and covered four main areas:

1. What did the 'worker' want to achieve, and what had she achieved ?
2. How did the 'worker' perceive the funders' intentions, and what did she think the funders had achieved ?
3. How did the 'worker' perceive the trainees' hopes, and what did she think they achieved ?
4. Questions relating to the 'differences' between all the women involved in the training project, ('workers' and 'trainees').

Following the general inductive approach to the research I used a process of inductive coding for the analysis of the transcripts. The process I adopted was that described by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, (1992), in which a coding scheme is drawn-up from representative responses to (mainly open-ended) questions and is then applied to the rest of the data. The coding scheme developed from these interviews had nine main areas:

1. Research method.
2. The 'workers'.
3. The funders' intentions.
4. The needs of the trainees.
5. The 'workers' within the funding structure.

6. Management.
7. The 'issues' of difference between all the women in the project.
8. Achievements.
9. The 'dream'.

Each of these main areas like the directory on a computer disc, had several branches and numerous sub-divisions.

THE CASE STUDY WITH THE 'WORKERS'.

The findings and analysis of the case study represented a cross-roads or roundabout within the research process. This inductive analysis produced many avenues down which the research could proceed. For instance, the case study itself could have been replicated within this country; a comparison could have been carried out by a case study in another European Member State; then there was the anticipated turning leading to a closer analysis of the role of the Local Authority; there was another that could have focused on the management style. Then there were the trainees themselves, and the research could, as originally intended, have concentrated on them, on what they say they want, and what they get, from the scheme. Finally, there was the road that led to a deeper consideration of the 'issues of difference': the divisions that cut across the assumed commonality of gender, (Brine, 1994a).

The dominant issue to emerge from the analysis was that of 'intention' and 'achievement'. These were sub-divided into immediate and future.
The aims and intentions of each group (workers, trainees and funders) fell broadly into two categories: immediate or short term aims - to be achieved during the training, and future or long-term aims - to be achieved as a result of the training.

The workers aimed to provide the trainees with a positive supportive learning environment which included, although not exclusively, the manual-skills training.

> "What I wanted was to be able to go in with such enthusiasm for my trade, and pass that on, basically. I wanted women to see that brickwork wasn't something so difficult that they couldn't contemplate doing it."

The workers long-term aim was that the trainees should gain paid employment and economic independence.

> "I wanted to give women economic independence because I do see that as being the nub of the whole thing. Whilst women and children are dependent on men they're never going to get anywhere."
>
> "I thought women would get good jobs as a result of the training. Because there were real jobs at the end of this, so that was one of the key features of why I wanted to do the job."

The workers' perceived the trainees' immediate needs to be either material or emotional. Some of the workers perceived a dissatisfaction from the trainees with regard to their immediate material needs such as childcare and financial assistance.

> "They want more money out of it. I think the trainees feel they don't get enough support with childcare, on-site crèche, but it will only take their children during lessons. Our women have to take their kids at lunchtime. They've got to use their lunchtime - when they want to sit and have a cup of coffee, maybe sit and think over what they've done."

On the other hand the workers believed the trainees' immediate emotional needs were well met by the training project. They pointed towards the importance of the projects' underlying 'equal opportunities' intentions and its broad educational process where the emphasis was on the trainees' experience and understanding of the world as 'women'. All of the workers stressed the importance of the 'woman-friendly' teaching style, particularly in the manual skills training. This, they believed, was particularly important considering the trainees had left school at the earliest possible age and with no qualifications. They saw the project as meeting the trainees' need for social contact and 'sense of belonging'. Additionally the workers believed that the trainees gained strength through their realization of the commonality of many of their gender, race and class determined 'problems' which led to a general raising of their political consciousness and basic 'empowerment'.

The workers referred to the confidence gained by the trainees when they realized that they could do something. Some also pointed out the fallibility of this process, saying some women head less confidence at the end of the course than they did at the beginning.

> "Some of them have ended up with more confidence than they had when they first came; some of them ended up with even less - through trying something and failing. ... For some of them it's good, but for others it's just been disastrous."
>
> "We should stop pretending that the target group of women that we've got is about to achieve the targets that the scheme sets them, because I think it does cause a lot of anxiety - for the trainees, sense of failure, disappointment."

Several workers pointed to the possible domestic problems and violence incurred by women who try and break out of their traditional role simply by taking part in the training project.

> "I think some of them don't realize what they're up against and are disappointed, so they come in really excited and raring to go, sure that they can cope with this, and do that - and six months later they're defeated by circumstances - it's never usually anything to do with the course, it's nearly always either marital, health or something to do with the kids. There's one at the moment - the DHS are messing her about so much, she's not getting any money and that's just adding to everything else. Another one, her husband said it's either me or the training, I'm not going to stand it any more. So, that's the negatives. And the other negative - yeah, just how long it takes before they earn this magical amount of money. Also, I don't think they realize how much they're going to have to question things and think."

The projects' attempt to meet the trainees' immediate material and emotional needs, whilst considerably better than most other institutions, nevertheless could not in itself compensate for the relative poverty of these working-class women. The training project does not exist in a protective bubble: the workers' comments refer to the material realities of these working-class womens' lives, showing both their class and their gendered oppression: economic poverty or highly restrictive income, and the emotional and physical restraints of some of the trainees' male partners.

The trainees' long term aspiration for future paid employment converged with the aim of the workers to train women for employment in manual occupations relevant to their training. The workers expressed their disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the projects' inability to achieve this aim.

> "Some women did get well paid jobs in traditional male jobs; a lot of women got confidence and skills - not in the accepted job way, but they got loads and loads from the training scheme. There's no way I want to knock it. But there's lots of women disappointed by the training scheme."

There were 103 trainees on the project at the beginning of 1990: 56 on the foundation course, and 47 continuing their more advanced training at the linked FE college. By the end of 1991 47 women were continuing their training, 5 women had gained training-related jobs and 3 women trade apprenticeships.

The workers believed that only a small number of trainees were actually interested in the manual skills training itself. And, of those who successfully completed the full training course and gained their City and Guilds trade qualification there was the final difficulty in obtaining full-time paid employment within the trade.

> "It's very difficult to get a job. In fact there's more opportunity to get a job in teaching it, rather than doing it."

The immediate needs of the trainees, material and emotional, were generally well met by the project. The future needs of the trainees, employment, were not.

The workers almost without exception used 'funder' to refer to the co-funding Local Authority and not the European Social Fund, (ESF). They perceived the funders' immediate aims to be covert ones as against the explicit future aim of training-related-employment. These immediate intentions of the funders fell into four main categories: the 'lure' of ESF money; the 'careerist' role of individual local councillors; political 'kudos'; and the institutionalization of feminist activists. In the workers' responses these four concerns were consistently interwoven with each other.

> "Ultimately what we're talking about is the ESF being there with a lot of money. I think what happened was that somebody in the Local Authority probably twigged that there was a lot of money in the ESF and that they could present a scheme that would enhance the quality of life of some people in the City, but also bring a building, a very prestigious building. They could get a lot of money out of the ESF."
>
> "Why did I think they did it? Because in my opinion they were going to Europe for money. They wanted to do something which was a big splash and they wanted to be seen to be doing it themselves, so they could get a bit of kudos from it. I think they just wanted to say that they had set up this big scheme, that they were going to do their best to provide something for women. There's a certain amount of kudos in saying that during our term of office we received so many thousands, millions, whatever from Europe, you know. So they wanted that, and it was easy money."

There was a general cynicism throughout the workers' responses regarding the funders' intentions. Several workers believed the project was only ever meant to be 'short-term' as the Local Authority was only interested in the

kudos to be gained from setting up the scheme: it was never intended to succeed or to continue.

Their apparent mistrust of the Local Authority's motives was most strongly expressed in relation to their explicit long-term intention of providing training leading to employment. Many of the workers expressed a smouldering kind of anger concerning the apparent inappropriateness of the training project.

> "It wasn't the right sort of training scheme for those women. Not at all. I think you could've provided the sort of facilities that women need up there at less expense, cost, and without the constant dilemma of 'what are we doing?'"

One worker believed that number of trainees who gained training-related-employment were just enough to ensure the continued funding from the Local Authority. Another questioned their acceptance of such low outcomes.

> "The training project hasn't trained any bricklayers. It's not just bricklayers - it hasn't trained any joiners either. Very few of any of the trades. At the end of the day it wasn't doing what I wanted it to do. I wanted to train women and prepare them for work in the manual trades. (*JB: And the Local Authority aren't bothered by that?)* No, they're not. And I don't know why. It wouldn't look good if they shut it down."

One worker said that out of a total intake of two hundred women, four gained training-related-employment. Some other women gained non-training related employment - "cleaning jobs in local hospitals and things", and a lot of women 'dropped out'. The workers also pointed out that the trainees who gained employment were simply returning to low-paid low-status work.

The workers' unanimous opinion was that women were not being trained in skills suitable to the needs of the local economy.

> "I genuinely believe that if the Local Authority could have got the money for anything, they would have set

> up secretarial, hosiery, traditional career type jobs. The strange thing was we were training women for manual skills and the only vacancies that were available were for over-lockists." (skilled machinists in the textile industry).

All but one of the workers explicitly questioned whether non-traditional manual skills training was the right training for these women. Some workers questioned the age of the targeted trainees.

> "Taking women over 25, I think that's restricted it quite a lot, certainly in terms of my trade. If I could have been training eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year old women, if they could have come straight out of school, college - they could've given it a go."

Some went on to question the funding policy itself. For instance,

> "This money was available in a particular way, and it wasn't available for doing things which the women of this city do want. I've no doubt the women of this city want office skill training; they want textile skill training; they want computer training - all this sort of thing, any number of things, and the money wasn't available in Europe for that: the money was available for manual skills."

The workers' comments on the suitability of manual skills training also generated questions relating to the ESF's later requirement for 'new technology' training. On the one hand, it seems, were the ESF demands that new technology be universally appended to all other training provision, and yet on the other hand, there was an apparent lack of interest shown in the actual content of the provision. The indication seems to be that it is simply the 'existence' of new technology training which is important, not the usefulness of it for the women involved. Such provision could be seen as tokenistic - simply providing the funders with the grounds to say: we *are* providing new technology training as well, (Brine, forthcoming/a).

All of the workers expressed differing degrees of suspicion that 'failure' had actually been built into the scheme: that is the Local Authority never wanted it to succeed, certainly not past its initial three-year ESF funding.

> "The situation was set up whereby we would actually get very few successes out of it in those terms (of women joining the construction industry), because the scheme was combing the idea of 'women into non-traditional skills' with the idea of 'positive action for women who'd never had a chance before'. There's huge numbers of women for whom life has treated so negatively that in one or two years, which is what we originally aimed to do, there is no way in which they can be successfully transformed into successful people in the employment market which is geared to youth, fitness, academic brain, all that - and ruthlessness as well."

The workers' perceptions of the funders' achievements point to two inter-locking themes: firstly that of non-traditional manual skills training, and secondly, their suspicion of possible 'in-built failure' - the lack of support and general disinterest shown by either funder (Local Authority or ESF) in the employment results of the project.

The aims and intentions of each of the three main groups of people involved in the project: the workers, the trainees and the funders, were identifiable either as *immediate* - to be achieved during the training, or *future* - to be achieved as a result of the training. Some, but not most, of the immediate aims or needs were shared by the various parties.

All the indications were that whereas the project met its immediate aims, the future aim, that of training related employment, was not achieved. Interwoven into many of their other concerns, the 'workers' repeatedly expressed their frustration over the project's lack of employment success which they linked with their suspicions of the funders' true intentions. Emerging from the interviews was their anger towards the Local Authority

and what they saw as their misuse of the huge 'equal opportunities' potential of the scheme, (Brine, forthcoming/b).

The interviews raised several questions concerning non-traditional manual skills training and the shared long-term aim of training-related-employment. Firstly, to what extent was the type of training wanted by the trainees ? Secondly, is it possible to train women from a starting position of gender-induced ignorance, and with two to three years workshop-based training and negligible site-experience, to a position where they can successfully compete with experienced men for jobs within an overwhelmingly male dominated constructed and building renovation industry ? Thirdly, to what extent does the low training-related-employment outcomes compound the past educational or employment failures which these working-class women often already have ? Finally, would the provision of increased choice of training meet those shared future employment needs as well as continuing to meet the trainees' immediate material and emotional needs ?

These questions led to the overall question to be addressed in the next stage of the research:

> Why did the funders fund this particular sort of training to these particular women, and why not something else ?

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